District Review Report

School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes)

May 17 - 19, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Geoff Jopson, Superintendent, School District No. 45 (West Vancouver)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Nechako Lakes
District Number:	91
Superintendent:	Gordon Milne
Date of Visit:	May 16-19, 2004
Team Chair:	Geoff Jopson, Superintendent, SD #45 (West Vancouver)
Team Members:	Warren Cocking, District Principal, SD 87 (Stikine) Stan Corfe, Parent, SD 35 (Langley) Penelope McLean, Ministry of Education Leah Robinson, Teacher, SD 52 (Prince Rupert) Mary-Anne Smirle, Principal, SD 23 (Central Okanagan) Sheila Wells, Principal, SD 52 (Prince Rupert) Lorna Williams, Ministry of Education

Context

School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes) encompasses over 60,000 square kilometers. It includes the communities of Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake, Burns Lake, Fort Fraser, Francois Lake, Grassy Plains, Topley, Granisle and 13 First Nations.

Distances between communities, schools and the Board Office within this geographical region are significant.

The economy of the region is primarily dependent on forestry. Agriculture, tourism and mining also provide significant employment. More recently, economic uncertainty within the region poses a challenge as it does to most northern districts with respect to student enrolment trends.

The Districtôs student population in 2003 was 6,400. Over 1,300 of their students are of Aboriginal ancestry and over 700 of these live on-reserve. The District employs approximately 700 people, including casual employees, making it the largest employer in the area. The Districtôs budget is in excess of $44,000,000 annually.

Nechako Lakes School District has 14 elementary schools, 3 elementary junior schools, 3 secondary schools, 8 adult/alternative schools, and a province-wide electronic delivery school in the district. School sizes range from Mapes Elementary with 45 students to the E-busing program with more than 1,000 students.

The District continues to address the challenges posed by the amalgamation of School District No. 56 (Nechako) and School District No. 55 (Burns Lake). A trend in decreasing student population from K-12 in the districtôs schools is somewhat offset by the increased enrollment in the electronic distance education program.

Summary of Process

The Review Team was welcomed at an informal dinner meeting at Nechako Valley Secondary School with the Superintendent, several trustees, senior staff, an Aboriginal support worker, the president of the Districtís Principal and Vice-Principalís Association and one teacher union president.

The District leadership team presented a power point presentation highlighting the District goals within the Accountability Contract and the 10 Points of Inquiry. Review team members were provided with a comprehensive binder that included extensive background information with respect to the District.

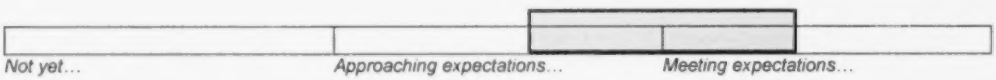
The District Review team had the opportunity to visit the following schools throughout the district and meet with principals, parents and school representatives: David Hoy, Decker Lake, Evelyn Dickson, Fort Fraser, Francois Lake, Mapes, Mouse Mountain, Sinkut View, W.L. McLeod, William Konkin Elementary schools; Fraser Lake Elementary Secondary, Babine Elementary Secondary, Grassy Plains Elementary Jr. Secondary; and Fort St. James, Lakes District, Nechako Valley secondary schools, as well as Nechako Electronic Busing.

Additionally, three members of the team met with the First Nations Education Council.

Review team members wish to thank the entire Nechako Lakes education community for their warm hospitality and open approach to this review.

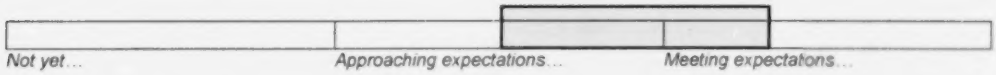
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. ***Goals:***
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



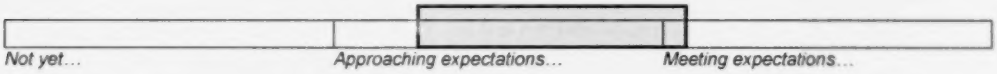
- The District and schools have identified goals that focus on student achievement.
- The four goals, objectives, and strategies in the district accountability contract are comprehensive and detailed.

2. ***Rationale:***
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, based on evidence, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



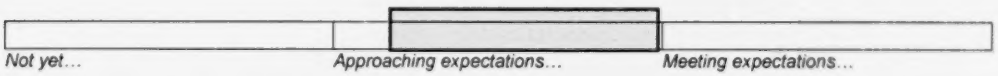
- The District and schools selected goals from a variety of sources of evidence, including provincial, district and local data.
- The evidence supports the District's priority to enhance the success of Aboriginal students.

3. ***Data:***
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



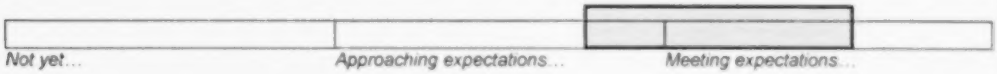
- The District and most schools are actively considering, interpreting and utilizing various sources of data.
- The District and most schools are using standardized testing as a source of data for academic goals.

4. ***Strategies:***
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



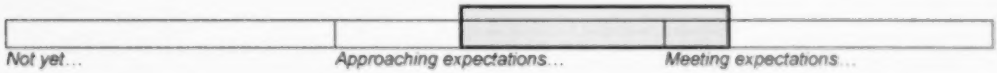
- Staff development is linked to strategies designed to address school and District goals.
- The District is encouraging schools to use Performance Standards as an assessment tool. Some schools are beginning to use the Performance Standards.

5. ***Structures***:
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



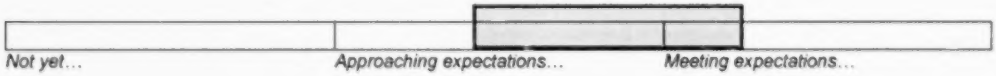
- The District supports and funds innovative and effective strategies at individual schools. A variety of initiatives are evident.
- The District and some schools have realigned structures to enable student achievement.
- Action research projects developed by school teams are strongly encouraged and supported by the District.

6. ***Results:***
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



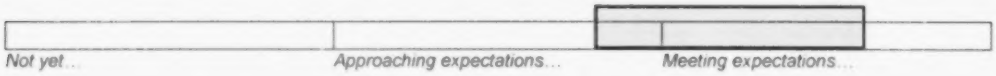
- The District and schools are beginning to develop meaningful performance targets.
- Some schools are to be commended for setting sophisticated targets based on three year trend data.
- Schools are adjusting strategies and structures in response to data results.

7. ***Communication:***
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



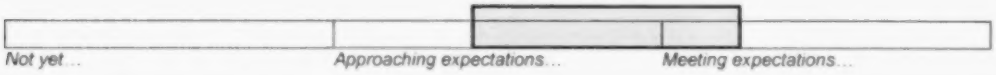
- The District and schools use a variety of methods to communicate externally with all education partners. These methods include newsletters, meetings, radio, newspaper articles and social events.
- Internal communication in a broad and diverse school district continues to be a challenge.

8. ***Teamwork – District and School Coherence:***
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.



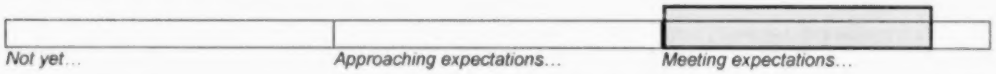
- School goals are consistently aligned with District goals.
- The District has shown a strong commitment to supporting the unique identity of each school.

9. ***Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement:***
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- Schools are making strong efforts to engage parents.
- School Planning Councils are still in the formative stage.

10. ***Leadership / Teamwork:***
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- There is evidence of leadership at all levels that focuses on student achievement.
- The District provides mentorship for staff development.
- The First Nations Education Council is bringing a holistic approach to improving Aboriginal student achievement from the individual, classroom, school, community and district level.
- Professional development opportunities are readily available to administrators and teachers.

Strengths

- The willingness of the District and CUPE to work together to create an agreement to increase the number of people of Aboriginal ancestry in Aboriginal education positions.
- The decision of the board to fund and support school projects.
- The active role that the First Nations Education Council plays in supporting Aboriginal achievement.
- The implementation of the Aboriginal tutoring program.
- The initiatives undertaken in several schools designed to improve student transitions in Grades 3-4 and 7-8.
- The work of Aboriginal education staff with Aboriginal students and families to support student achievement.
- The collaborative approach demonstrated by a committed and dedicated staff.
- The wide-spread adoption of the "Blended Structure and Style" program designed to enhance student writing skills.
- The use of the Positive Behaviour Support program in many schools.
- The innovative and widely recognized E-bus program.
- The Aboriginal Needs Assessment provides the district and communities with a clear, comprehensive picture of the performance of Aboriginal students. It also gives Aboriginal parents and the community a voice for their views regarding the education of their students.
- Secondary school students are able to participate in strategic community-based projects involving heavy duty mechanics, forestry and agriculture.

Promising Practices

The Team identified the following District and school practices that could be helpful for other Districts with a similar focus:

- Early Intervention Program: An Early Literacy and Numeracy Screening project that encompasses a significant inservice/networking component for classroom teachers to enable them to address the results from the screening. Trained teacher aide support is provided on an on-going basis.

- "E-Bus" Adult Education Project: Utilizing the "E-Bus" infrastructure adults/parents are provided with the opportunity to complete their secondary school certification in order to better support their children's learning.

- Full Day; Every Day Kindergarten: The District is financially supporting a number of schools to establish full day, every day Kindergarten classes in schools where school entrance literacy skills are weak.

- Parent Inservice Day: A day long workshop for parents to help them support their child's well-being and academic development. Workshops are facilitated by staff and guest lecturers.

- Working Partnerships: The First Nations Education Council and the District have worked together to foster stronger partnerships between Aboriginal communities and education partners.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the district:

- provide ongoing training for all members of the School Planning Councils.
- provide further leadership in the development of a structure for collecting and managing student achievement data.
- consider reducing the number of goals in its accountability contract to ensure greater focus and the likelihood of goal achievement.
- develop or adopt a report card that will provide consistency across the district.
- provide expertise to school staff as they strive to increase the cultural relevance of their academic strategies, building on the strengths and knowledge of Aboriginal people.
- further encourage the closer examination, interpretation and utilization of data collected at the classroom level, including the use of Performance Standards.
- encourage the further development of District leadership opportunities for parents.